Crisis and Risk Communication Essentials for Public Health Professionals
Presenter

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What is risk communication?

The dynamic, interactive process of sharing information strategically and effectively about an issue of high concern to help people:

- Cope
- Make informed decisions
- Understand sensitive issues
What are your risk communication challenges?
2 Risk Communication Environments
Risk = Hazard + Outrage*

* Peter Sandman, www.psandman.com
What elevates emotion?
How people gauge risk

- Is it familiar?
- Affect vulnerable populations?
- Easy to understand?
- Do I have any control over it?
- Intentional or naturally occurring?
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How does outrage play out?

“mental noise”
Address the outrage first
Show empathy.
Name what people are feeling.
Allow people to feel upset.
Give people a choice of actions.

- Prevent the flu by washing your hands frequently, getting plenty of rest, and avoiding crowded places.
- Talk to your employer about plans for sick leave.
- Sign up for email updates from Public Health.
Use repetition.
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Risk communication is social.
Don’t over-reassure

"We are very encouraged that the results from our monitoring of air quality and drinking water conditions in both New York and near the Pentagon show that the public in these areas is not being exposed to excessive levels of asbestos or other harmful substances... I am glad to reassure the people of New York and Washington, D.C. that their air is safe to breathe and their water is safe to drink."

- U.S. EPA Director Christine Todd Whitman, September 18, 2001
Timing is everything.
What’s real? What’s credible?
Fill the information void...

...or someone else will.

blah blah blah

vaccine is evil

blah blah blah
Speak first (ish).

Why do organizations hold back?
You don’t have to have all the answers.
First Messages

1) An expression of empathy
2) What you know: confirmed facts and action steps
3) What you don’t know
4) What you’ve done, and what you’ll be doing next
5) Statement of commitment to help people through crisis
6) Where to go for more information
Developing the message
Keep it simple.
What do people want to know?

- Am I or my family in danger?
- How can I protect myself and my family?
- What happened?
- What caused this?
- What’s being to done to keep us safe?
What do they *not* want to know?

- What systems does FDA have in place to protect the U.S. food supply?
- What products come to the U.S. from Japan?
- What specific tests is FDA using?
- What does FDA look for when it tests food for radioactive contamination?
Which would you rather read?

IF YOU DON'T HAVE ELECTRICITY

PREVENT POISONING FROM CARBON MONOXIDE

- ONLY use a generator outdoors and far from open windows and vents
- NEVER use a generator indoors, in garages or carports
- NEVER cook or heat inside on a charcoal or gas grill

Public Health
Seattle & King County
www.metrokc.gov/health
Warning: Extreme Heat Event

Cool the fuels of your inner fires.

Plain language please!
1 in 10,000
or
1 in 1 million?
Some people are at much greater risk of serious health problems if they get the flu. If you go to school or other gatherings when you are still spreading the virus, you will put others at risk.

Many people who are at higher risk look healthy.
Let’s give it a try.

Mobile sources are responsible for direct emissions of air toxics and contribute to precursor emissions which react to form secondary pollutants.
More information

- CDC Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication (CERC)
  http://emergency.cdc.gov/CERC
- The Peter Sandman Risk Communication Site:
  petersandman.com
- Public Health – Seattle & King County Advanced Practice Center
  http://www.apctoolkits.com